

POPULAR MUSIC AND AMERICAN CULTURE



This course offers an introduction to the field of cultural studies by focusing on the significance and meaning of popular music in American culture. In addition to developing your interpretive toolkits, critical thinking skills, and writing abilities, it will allow you to explore a number of key questions about the aesthetics, poetics, and politics of popular music. From lessons on various forms of music writing (i.e. the album review, the personal essay, etc.) to critical studies of subcultures and scenes, this class will help you to think more deeply not only about music itself, but about the other issues (identity, taste, race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.) we talk about when we talk about music.

Because it is a Freshman Writing Intensive Seminar (FWIS), writing will obviously be an essential component of the course. This means that, by taking this course, you will:

1. Enhance your understanding of the central place of writing and communication in the learning process and in academic life;
2. Learn strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, organizing, and responding to college-level materials;
3. Improve your ability to communicate correctly and effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose;
4. Become comfortable with writing as a process and learn strategies—for instance, prewriting, outlining, and revision—for working through that process;
5. Learn appropriate use of the work of others and, where necessary, specific practices of citation; and
6. Learn to articulate oral arguments and to respond productively to arguments of others in formal presentations and in-class discussions.

In short, though, the purpose of this course is to show you some ways to read and listen more deeply, to come up with more interesting insights on how different pieces of writing and music work, to have informed, intelligent reasons for liking or disliking those works, and to write—clearly, persuasively, and above all interestingly—about the things you’ve read and listened to.

Andrew Klein - aak@rice.edu - Office Hours in Fondren 504 by Appointment

UNIT 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION

M, 1/13

Introduction to Unit

- What you need to do before class: Learn where the classroom is and how long it will take you to get there / Show up on time with a folder, a notebook, and a writing implement / Turn off your phones and close your computers / Prepare yourself physically and mentally for the seminar / Introduce yourself to your neighbor(s) and talk casually until class begins / Or, if you need to chill, you can skip that last part
- What we will do in class: I'll introduce myself and explain what this course is about / You'll introduce yourselves / I'll go over policies and rationales / You'll ask questions / We'll do some deep listening activities

W, 1/15

Popular Music and American Culture in 2020

- What you need to do before class: Read (at least) the top twenty entries in Pitchfork's "Best Songs of the 2010s" feature / Read (at least) three of the entries in The New York Times' "The Top 25 Songs That Matter Right Now" feature / Write a short essay in which you discuss a song you like, a song that you think is culturally significant, and the difference between the two categories / Print the essay out / Prepare to discuss it and what you thought about the readings in class
- What we will do in class: We'll discuss what the readings have to teach us about popular music and American culture in 2020 / You'll summarize your essay for the class

M, 1/20

* No Class *

W, 1/22

Popular Music and Cultural Criticism in 2020

- What you need to do before class: Read the assigned features in Pitchfork's 2010s series / Read the assigned features in Tiny Mix Tapes' 2010s series / Prepare to present your features to the class
- What we will do in class: You'll meet with your group to discuss the assigned features and prepare to explain them to the rest of the class / We'll hear from each group / We'll discuss what the features have to teach us about popular music criticism in 2020

UNIT 2: THE PERSONAL ESSAY

M, 1/27

Introduction to Unit

- What you need to do before class: Read the three selected personal essays / Identify the tension or question that each essay raises, the way it is developed or explored, and the understanding that it arrives at
- What we will do in class: I'll explain what this unit is about / We'll discuss the personal essays in terms of the categories above

W, 1/29

Pop and Its Critics

- What you need to do before class: Read Chapters 1 + 2 of Carl Wilson's *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* / Complete Step #1 of the Personal Essay Assignment

- What we will do in class: You'll respond to a writing prompt / We'll discuss the reading and its connection to our own lives / You'll explain your timeline to the class

M, 2/3

Pop in a Global and Historical Context

- What you need to do before class: Read Chapters 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 of Carl Wilson's *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* / Complete Step #2 of the Personal Essay Assignment
- What we will do in class: You'll respond to a writing prompt / We'll discuss the reading and its connection to your essays / You'll explain your mind map to the class

W, 2/5

On Good and Bad Taste

- What you need to do before class: Read Chapters 7 + 8 of Carl Wilson's *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* / Complete Step #3 of the Personal Essay Assignment
- What we will do in class: You'll respond to a writing prompt / We'll discuss the reading and its connection to your essays / You'll explain your self-analysis to the class

M, 2/10

On Fans and Feelings

- What you need to do before class: Read Chapters 9 + 10 of Carl Wilson's *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* / Complete Step #4 of the Personal Essay Assignment
- What we will do in class: You'll respond to a writing prompt / We'll discuss the reading and its connection to your essays / You'll explain your research to the class

W, 2/12

Conclusions

- What you need to do before class: Read Chapters 11 + 12 of Carl Wilson's *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* / Complete Step #5 of the Personal Essay Assignment
- What we will do in class: You'll respond to a writing prompt / We'll discuss the reading and its connection to your essays / You'll explain your two essay outlines, including the benefits and drawbacks of each to the class

UNIT 3: THE ALBUM REVIEW

M, 2/17

Introduction to Unit

- What you need to do before class: Listen to Lana Del Rey's *Norman Fucking Rockwell!* as many times and in as many situations as you can muster / Fill out the album review listening form
- What we will do in class: I'll explain what this unit is about / We'll discuss the LDR album in terms of the categories on the album review listening form

W, 2/19

The Form of the Album Review 1

- What you need to do before class: Continue listening to Lana Del Rey's *Norman Fucking Rockwell!* / Read the three selected album reviews

- What we will do in class: We'll discuss your most recent thoughts on the LDR album / We'll discuss the assigned reviews in terms of content, structure, and style

M, 2/24

The Form of the Album Review 2

- What you need to do before class: Continue listening to Lana Del Rey's *Norman Fucking Rockwell!* / Read the three selected album reviews
- What we will do in class: We'll discuss your most recent thoughts on the LDR album/ We'll discuss the assigned reviews in terms of content, structure, and style

W, 2/26

Writing Workshop

- What you need to do before class: Write a full draft of your album review/ Print it out so you can bring a copy to class
- What we will do in class: You'll explain your review to the class / You'll work in groups to think about the content, structure, and style of you review as well as ways to improve it

UNIT 4: CULTURAL STUDIES

M, 3/2

Introduction to Unit

- What you need to do before class: Read Hua Hsu's "Stuart Hall and the Rise of Cultural Studies" / Watch the Stuart Hall lecture / Listen to Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road"
- What we will do in class: I'll explain what this unit is about and outline the development of the field of cultural studies / We'll discuss Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" and the controversy it created vis a vis race and genre

W, 3/4

Racial Formations

- What you need to do before class: Read Michael Omi and Howard Winant's "Racial Formations" / Write down any questions you have
- What we will do in class: We'll go through the Omi and Winant reading slowly and carefully / We'll talk about how their theory of racial formation is applicable to contemporary cultural production

M, 3/9

The Minstrel Reprise

- What you need to do before class: Read Chapters 1 + 2 of Jeffrey Ogbar's *Hip Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* / Write down any questions you have
- What we will do in class: We'll go through the Ogbar reading slowly and carefully / We'll talk about how his work is applicable to contemporary cultural production

W, 3/11

Segregating Sound

- What you need to do before class: Read the selections from Karl Hagstrom Miller's *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* / Write down any questions you have

- What we will do in class: We'll go through the Miller reading slowly and carefully / We'll talk about how his work is applicable to contemporary cultural production

M, 3/16 * No Class *

W, 3/18 * No Class *

M, 3/23 Country Soul

- What you need to do before class: Read the selections from Charles L. Hughes' *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* / Write down any questions you have
- What we will do in class: We'll go through the Miller reading slowly and carefully / We'll talk about how his work is applicable to contemporary cultural production

W, 3/25 How to Write an Academic Paper

- What you need to do before class: Read the selected passages from Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* / Fill out the essay planning form
- What we will do in class: We'll review the Graff and Birkenstein reading vis a vis the Critical Essay Assignment / You'll explain your essay planning form to the class and receive feedback on how to make it better

UNIT 5: SCENES, SUBCULTURES, NEO-TRIBES

M, 3/30 Introduction to Unit

- What you need to do before class: Read Shane Blackman's "Youth Subcultural Theory: A Critical Engagement with the Concept, its Origins and Politics, from the Chicago School to Postmodernism" / Read Eleni Dimou and Jonathan Ilan's "Taking Pleasure Seriously: The Political Significance of Subcultural Practice" / Write down any questions you have
- What we will do in class: I'll explain what this unit is about and outline the development of the field of subcultural studies / We'll go through the readings slowly and carefully / We'll discuss how they are applicable to contemporary cultural formations

W, 4/1 From Disco to House: The Politics of Pleasure and the Vicissitudes of Genre

- What you need to do before class: Watch Vox's Video on "The Ingredients of a Classic House Track" / Read the selections from Micah Salkind's *Do You Remember House?: Chicago's Queer of Color Undergrounds*
- What we will do in class: We'll go through the readings slowly and carefully / We'll discuss how they are applicable to contemporary cultural formations

M, 4/6 Hardcore

- What you need to do before class: Watch Paul Rachman's *American Hardcore* / Read Konstantin Butz's "Rereading American Hardcore: Intersectional Privilege and the Lyrics of Early Californian

Hardcore Punk” / Prepare to discuss the film and the essay in terms of their relationship to last Monday’s readings

- What we will do in class: We’ll discuss the film and the essay in terms of their relationship to last Monday’s readings / We’ll explore some other artifacts from the American Hardcore scene

W, 4/8

Riot Grrrl

- What you need to do before class: Watch Sini Anderson’s *The Punk Singer* / Read Lindsay Zoladz’s “Not Every Girl Is a Riot Grrrl” / Read Gabby Bess’ “Alternatives to Alternatives: The Black Grrrl Riot Ignored” / Prepare to discuss the film and the essays in terms of their relationship to the early readings in this unit
- What we will do in class: We’ll discuss the film and the essays in terms of their relationship to last Monday’s readings / We’ll explore some other artifacts from the Riot Grrrl scene

M, 4/13

A Brief History of Houston Hip Hop

- What you need to do before class: Read the selected passages from Maco L. Faniel’s *Hip-Hop in Houston: The Origin and Legacy* / Read the selected passages from Lance Scott Walker’s *Houston Rap Tapes: An Oral History of Bayou City Hip-Hop* / Listen to the Houston Hip Hop playlist
- What we will do in class: We’ll discuss the readings through the lens of subcultural theory / We’ll explore some other artifacts from the Houston Hip Hop Scene

W, 4/15

ArcGIS Story Maps

- What you need to do before class: Accept the ArcGIS Story Maps invitation and sign in / Watch the tutorial video / Explore the Story Maps gallery / Write down any questions you have
- What we will do in class: We’ll go over the features of the ArcGIS Story Maps program/ We’ll discuss the the positives and negatives of past projects / You’ll start designing your scene study Story Map.

M, 4/20

Student Presentations 1

- What you need to do before class: Continue working on your scene study StoryMap / Prepare for your presentation.
- What we will do in class: Half of the class will present their scene study projects.

W, 4/22

Student Presentations 2

- What you need to do before class: Continue working on your scene study StoryMap / Prepare for your presentation.
- What we will do in class: Half of the class will present their scene study projects.

TBD

Final Exam / Final Projects Due

REQUIRED TEXTS + EXPENSES

Please purchase the following books as soon as possible. I will provide you with copies of all other readings:

- Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein - *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*
- Carl Wilson - *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste*

You should also factor in the cost of a concert ticket as you figure out your expenses for the course.

Finally, I would recommend buying a folder and a notebook that you use only for this class.

GRADING

You will receive detailed instructions and a grading rubric for each assignment well before it's due. For your final grade, though, I will use this formula:

- 10% = Live Review
- 10% = Participation
- 15% = Album Review
- 20% = Personal Essay
- 20% = Cultural Studies Essay
- 25% = Scene Study Project

POLICIES

Attendance - It is expected that you will show up to each class session on time, with the reading done and any assignments ready to turn in. However, you are allowed one free absence. If you miss more than that, without a truly legitimate excuse, your final grade will drop by a third of a letter (i.e. from a B+ to a B) with each additional absence. If you consistently show up late, your grade may also drop.

Participation - Simply showing up, however, is the least you can do. Because this is a small, discussion-based seminar, it is expected that you will also be an active participant. This means that you will have done the reading, brought the text to class, *and* have some interesting things to say about it. It also means that you will listen to others and respond to them with curiosity and respect. If any of these conditions are not met, your participation grade will drop.

Electronic Policy - You must turn off all electronic devices before class begins. This includes phones, watches, e-readers, and laptops (except when specifically allowed). If I see you breaking this rule, your participation grade will drop.

Formatting Assignments - All written assignments must be printed out, stapled together, and submitted in class on the day they are due (unless otherwise noted on the assignment sheet). They should be double-spaced, written in 12-point font (preferably Times New Roman), and have 1-inch margins. They should contain your name, the date, an insightful title, and a correctly-formatted works cited page. If any of these conditions are not met, your assignment grade will drop.

Rewrites - Because this is a writing-intensive seminar, and because rewriting is an essential part of the writing process, you are welcome to rewrite any major paper, provided that: 1) I believe you gave the first draft your best effort; 2) you meet with me in person to discuss your original paper and your plans for the rewrite; and 3) you turn in the rewrite within one week of our meeting. The grade you receive on the rewrite will replace the grade you received on the original paper (even if it's lower).

Plagiarism - Familiarize yourself with the Rice University Honor Code, if you have not done so already. The bottom line, though, is that plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade. You need to think for yourself and cite the work of others by using some well-regarded style guide (MLA, Chicago, etc.). We will go over citation practices in class, but please ask if you have any questions.

Accommodations - If you have a documented disability that requires academic adjustments, please: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841 / <https://dss.rice.edu>); and 2) meet with me to discuss your needs sometime during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.

Meetings - I am happy to meet with you to discuss readings, class discussions, writing assignments, etc. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or want to talk; just send me an email and we will find a time that works. I just ask that you plan ahead because, in general, I only answer emails once a day. I also encourage you to take advantage of the Center for Professional and Academic Communication (located on the 2nd floor of Fondren.)